

Testimony of Veteran Dru Macasieb
U.S. Education Department's Negotiated Regulatory Rulemaking Panel
December 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Dru Macasieb and I'm a veteran from San Diego, CA. I'm here to tell you about my experiences with post-secondary education as both an education management professional and as a student veteran. I have worked in post-secondary education for over a decade in positions ranging from instructor to Associate Dean at Independence University, and I am currently a student veteran at California Institute of Arts & Technology (CIAT) enrolled under the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP).

From my early days working in post-secondary education, I've seen the way veterans are treated like cash cows. The school knows that they'll receive funding from veterans' benefits. Therefore, their main objective is NOT to educate veterans, but rather to ensure that they stay enrolled long enough for the school to get paid.

When veterans miss class or are underperforming, the automatic assumption is that they're lazy. Schools discount the idea that these veterans may have underlying disabilities that make school much more difficult. Special accommodations are available for veterans for this very reason. Unfortunately, the schools rarely mention them. The majority of the veterans that I've spoken to have some type of disability yet aren't aware of special accommodations.

Recently, my current school, CIAT, announced that it will transition to a 100% virtual campus in January, with less than 60 days notice. This unexpected and abrupt

decision disproportionately impacts on-campus veterans because they will lose the housing allowance they were depending on and are prohibited from transferring to another school by the VRRAP program. How can CIAT renegotiate our enrollment agreement without our approval? This feels like the classic bait and switch. How is this not discrimination based on veteran, employment, and disability status since the most adversely affected are the 13 VRRAP students? VRRAP has already paid the school half the tuition, upfront; therefore, this allows schools like CIAT to make decisions without regard for the financial impact on some of its most vulnerable populations.

Students currently do not know what to do as the winter break looms and their livelihood in the new year is uncertain. Increased stress and anxiety has made it difficult to focus. While some students might be able to drop or transfer out, that's a very difficult choice, and not an option for veterans like me.

I am testifying today in the hopes that some restrictions can be placed on these schools that target veterans with deceptive recruiting tactics, use up all of our benefits, and leave us with a subpar education.

Thank you for your time.